

Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Withdrawn) A process for producing higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates from a gas comprising methane, said process comprising:
generating synthesis gas ("syngas") comprising carbon monoxide and hydrogen by reaction of a gas comprising methane with steam and/or an oxidant gas comprising oxygen;
producing higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates in a syngas conversion process;
removing offgas comprising unreacted hydrogen and unreacted carbon monoxide from said syngas conversion process; and
separating unreacted hydrogen from said offgas or from a gas derived therefrom to produce separated hydrogen product, wherein unreacted hydrogen is separated in a cryogenic separation process to produce separated hydrogen product that is substantially free of unreacted carbon monoxide and a first cryogenic liquid comprising unreacted carbon monoxide, characterised in that the process further comprises:
separating unreacted carbon monoxide from said first cryogenic liquid or from a cryogenic liquid derived therefrom in a cryogenic distillation column to produce separated carbon monoxide product and substantially carbon monoxide-free cryogenic liquid.
2. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1 wherein the cryogenic separation process is a liquid methane wash.
3. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein higher molecular weight

hydrocarbon compounds are produced, said process further comprising using separated hydrogen product for hydrogenation of a fraction of said higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds to produce liquid hydrocarbon compounds.

4. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 3, wherein said separated hydrogen product is used in the hydrogenation of said hydrocarbon fraction without purification.

5. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, further comprising recycling separated carbon monoxide product for conversion into higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates.

6. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said first cryogenic liquid further comprises argon, said process further comprising removing at least one argon-enriched stream from a location in the region of high argon concentration in the cryogenic distillation column.

7. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the substantially carbon monoxide-free cryogen liquid is substantially pure liquid methane, said process further comprising recycling a vaporised portion of said substantially pure liquid methane for conversion into syngas.

8. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said offgas further comprises helium, said process further comprising separating helium from said separated hydrogen product using a membrane separation system.

9. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said offgas further comprises low molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds, said process further comprising:

cooling said offgas or a gas derived therefrom to condense said low molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds to produce liquefied petroleum gas ("LPG") and removing said LPG to produce substantially LPG-free offgas;

cooling and at least partially condensing said substantially LPG-free offgas to produce partially condensed substantially LPG-free offgas; and

separating unreacted hydrogen from a vapour portion of said partially condensed substantially LPG-free offgas in said cryogenic separation process to produce said separated hydrogen product and said first cryogenic liquid.

10. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 9 wherein unreacted hydrogen is present in said first cryogenic liquid, said process further comprising separating unreacted hydrogen from said first cryogenic liquid or a cryogenic liquid derived therefrom in a further cryogenic separation process to produce separated hydrogen fuel by-product and a second cryogenic liquid comprising unreacted carbon monoxide.

11. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 10 wherein the further cryogenic separation process is a liquid methane wash.

12. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 10, wherein said offgas further comprises helium and wherein separated hydrogen product is recycled for conversion into higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds, said process further comprising removing a portion of said separated hydrogen product once the concentration of the helium in the separated hydrogen product is between from 1 mol % to 20 mol %.

13. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 12 wherein said portion is adjusted in flowrate so that the helium concentration reaches the required concentration.

14. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, further comprising at least partially vaporising liquid nitrogen ("LIN") to provide refrigeration duty to keep the process in heat balance.

15. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein the oxidant gas is oxygen with a purity below 99 mol % produced in an integrated cryogenic air separation process, said LIN being produced in said air separation process.

16. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein separated hydrogen product is recycled for conversion into higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds.

17. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim I, wherein said syngas is generated by partially oxidizing natural gas with oxygen and by reforming natural gas with steam.

18. (Withdrawn) A process as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said syngas conversion process is a Fischer-Tropsch ("FT") process.

19. **(Currently Amended)** An apparatus for the production of higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates from a gas comprising methane, said apparatus comprising:

a syngas generation system configured to generate syngas comprising carbon monoxide and hydrogen by reaction of the gas comprising methane with steam and an oxidant gas comprising oxygen, wherein heat for endothermic syngas generation is produced by exothermic reaction of the gas comprising methane with the oxidant gas;

a syngas conversion system configured to convert syngas into higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates and producing offgas comprising unreacted hydrogen and unreacted carbon monoxide;

a cryogen separation system configured to separate unreacted hydrogen from said offgas or a gas derived therefrom to produce separated hydrogen product that is substantially free of unreacted carbon monoxide and a first cryogenic liquid comprising unreacted carbon monoxide and unreacted hydrogen, the cryogen separation system being a first liquid methane wash column;

a second liquid methane wash column configured to separate unreacted hydrogen from said first cryogenic liquid or a cryogenic liquid derived therefrom to produce separated hydrogen fuel by-product and a second cryogenic liquid comprising unreacted carbon monoxide;

a nitrogen rejection column configured to separate nitrogen from said second cryogenic liquid to produce a third cryogenic liquid;

a cryogenic distillation column configured to separate unreacted carbon monoxide from said third cryogenic liquid to produce separated carbon monoxide product and substantially carbon monoxide-free cryogenic liquid; **[[and]]**

a conduit for feeding separated **carbon[~~-~~]-monoxide** product from said cryogenic distillation column to said syngas conversion system ~~to remove Argon in a region above a bottom of the cryogen distillation column; and~~

a conduit located above a bottom of the cryogenic distillation column for removing an argon-enriched sidestream from the cryogenic distillation column.

20. (Canceled)

21. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, producing higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds, said apparatus further comprising a hydrogenation system configured to hydrogenate a fraction of said higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds using separated hydrogen product to produce liquid hydrocarbon compounds.

22. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, further comprising conduit means for feeding separated-carbon monoxide product from said cryogenic distillation column to said syngas conversion system.

23. (Canceled)

24. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein said substantially carbon monoxide-free cryogenic liquid is substantially pure liquid methane, said apparatus further comprising conduit means for feeding substantially pure liquid methane from said cryogenic distillation column to said syngas generation system.

25. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein the offgas further comprises helium, said apparatus further comprising a membrane separation system configured to remove helium from separated hydrogen product.

26. (Canceled)

27. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein said offgas further comprises helium and wherein separated hydrogen product is recycled for conversion into higher molecular weight hydrocarbon compounds or oxygenates, said apparatus further

comprising conduit means for removing a portion of said separated hydrogen product having a concentration of helium between from 1 mol % to 20 mol %.

28. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein the syngas generation system comprises a partial oxidation ("POX") reactor and an enhanced heat transfer reformer ("EHTR") in which the gas comprising methane reacts with the steam.

29. (Previously Presented) An apparatus as claimed in Claim 19, wherein the syngas conversion system comprises at least one Fischer-Tropsch ("FT") reactor.